

SOCIOLOGY OF THE ABORIGINES OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

R. H. MATHEWS, L.S.

(Read March 17, 1905.)

Five years ago I communicated an article to the Society,¹ dealing with some of the customs of the natives of Western Australia. On that occasion I described the organization of a number of tribes possessing four divisions in their social structure. In the present paper it is proposed to give a short explanation of a different organization, found among some tribes occupying the northeastern corner of Western Australia, comprising the country drained by the sources of the Ord, Denham, King and other rivers, Stirling Creek, Sturt Creek, Margaret River and the Upper Fitzroy. Some of the best known of the aboriginal tribes within the immense geographic limits mentioned, are the Lunga, Kityu, Charrau and Nining.

All the details given in this article have been gathered by me through the kind assistance of correspondents who reside in the Kimberly district of Western Australia, in the region inhabited by the tribes treated of. I sent them categorical lists of all the points upon which I wanted information and gave them directions how to proceed with the investigations. From the reliable character of my correspondents, and my own general knowledge of the subject, I feel sure that their work can be depended upon. It is unnecessary to add that I am under no obligations to any other authors.

A whole tribe, or it may be a community of several tribes, is nominally divided into two portions, which may be called phratries, groups, or any other distinguishing title. Next there is a repartition of each phratry into four parts, which for purposes of reference, may be called sections or classes. A name is given to each section, by means of which the members of the different divisions are readily distinguished; and identification is further facilitated by a masculine and feminine form of every one of the eight names.

A phratry therefore contains four given sections of men, who

¹ "Native Tribes of Western Australia," PROC. AMER. PHILOS. SOC., Vol. XXXIX, pp. 123-125.

marry certain four sections of women. In other words, the men of one phratry marry the daughters of the men of the other, in a certain fixed rotation. The constitution of the phratries, the nomenclature of the sections, with the order of intermarriage and the designation of the children, will be readily understood by an examination of the following tabular synopsis :

TABLE I.

Phratry.	Father.	Mother.	Son.	Daughter.
A	Changura	Nungulla	Chabuldyi	Nabicherri
	Chanima	Nulima	Chungarin	Nabungarti
	Chungulla	Nangilli	Chambin	Nambin
	Chulima	Nabana	Chakara	Nakara
B	Chakara	Nabicherri	Chulima	Nulima
	Chambin	Nabungarti	Chungulla	Nungulla
	Chungarin	Nambin	Chanima	Nabana
	Chabuldyi	Nakara	Changura	Nangilli

The above table gives the phratry, father, mother, son and daughter on the same line across the page. For example, Changura takes a Nungulla as his wife, which is the ordinary or normal rule of marriage and may be called "No. 1." He could instead marry a Nulima, which I shall designate as "No. 2." Or he could mate with a Nabana woman as "No. 3." And lastly, he may espouse a Nangilli, who can be distinguished as "No. 4." Marriages of the "No. 1" type, which are those given in the table, are the most usual; "No. 2" is the next most in favor; whilst "No. 3" and "No. 4" are more or less uncommon, although quite lawful.

In the tribes we are now discussing the section to which the children belong, and consequently the phratry also, is invariably determined through the women. Taking an example from phratry A in Table I: If Changura wed a Nungulla, as in the table, his children will be Chabuldyi and Nabicherri; if he take a Nulima spouse, they will be Chungarin and Nabungarti; if he choose a Nabana, the offspring will be Chakara and Nakara; and if his wife be a Nangilli, then his family will be Chambin and Nambin.

We will now show the wives eligible to Chanima, the next name in Table I. He marries Nulima as his tabular wife or "No. 1"; he takes Nungulla as his alternative spouse, or "No. 2"; he mates with Nangilli as "No. 3," and he can marry a Nabana woman as

"No. 4." Similarly Chungulla and Chulima can marry either of the women opposite their names in the table as "No. 1" and "No. 2" wives; or they can take Nulima or Nungulla as their "No. 3" and "No. 4."

It appears, then, that any specific man in Phratry A can marry any one of the four women opposite to him in the column headed "mother" in the table. Everything which has been said respecting the marriages in Phratry A applies equally to the marriages of the men and women in Phratry B.

All the people have totems, consisting of animals, plants, the elements, and so on, but there is no well established descent of any given totem from the parents to their offspring. Indeed, there could not be any regular succession of the totems in a tribe where the intermarrying laws are as stated in Table I. For example, if descent were through the males, and Changura's totem were a bandicoot, it would not only be liable to be disseminated through the children of any or all the sections in Phratry A, but in the next generation it would be similarly distributed to the children of all the men in Phratry B. Hence, in a tribe where the sociology is so constituted, we discover that in some cases the totems follow the father, in others the mother, and again in other instances the children inherit the totem of neither parent. The totem of the offspring is determined by the old men in accordance with customary laws, which need not now be entered upon.

Space will not permit of a genealogical tree, but the reader can easily construct one for himself from the following explanation. A study of Table I discloses that Chabuldyi, the first name in the "son" column, has a normal or "tabular" father, Changura. But he may have what we shall distinguish as an "alternative" father. Of these "alternative" fathers Chanima is the most general, whilst Chungulla and Chulima are not so frequent.

Looking at Table I, we see that Changura's father is Chabuldyi, and the latter's father is Changura. That is, Changura's paternal grandfather is Changura, the same as himself. Then Changura marries his father's "tabular" father's sister's son's daughter Nungulla, as "No. 1" wife already described. Or he marries his father's "tabular" father's sister's daughter's daughter Nabana as "No. 3." Again, Changura may espouse his father's "alternative" father's sister's son's daughter Nulima for "No. 2." Or he can take his father's "alternative" father's sister's daughter's daughter Nangilli as his "No. 4" wife.

The genealogy of Changura's wives could likewise be traced through his mother's father. A woman ascertains who are her potential husbands by going back to her mother's "tabular" father, or her mother's "alternative" father, as well as her father's father, from which point the pedigree is the same in principle as that of last paragraph. It is manifest, therefore, that whichever one of the four specific women which a man is allowed to take as a wife, possesses practically the same relationship to him, although through different channels. The lineage from which a man obtains his wife is decided by the elders of the tribe.

PARRAMATTA, NEW SOUTH WALES.

February, 1905.

Stated Meeting, April 7, 1905.

President SMITH in the Chair.

A letter was read from Mr. James Douglas describing a so-called shower of toads which he saw in the Sulphur Spring Valley, Arizona, and confirming the observations of Dr. C. C. Abbott (see these PROCEEDINGS, Vol. XLIII, p. 163).

The decease was announced of the following members :

Henri Louis Frédéric de Saussure, at Geneva, Switzerland,
on February 20, 1905, æt. 75.

F. A. Randall, M.D., at Warren, Pa., on January 23, 1905.

Dr. Alexander C. Abbott read a paper on "Epidemic Cerebro-Spinal Meningitis."

General Meeting, April 12, 13, and 14, 1905.

April 12,

Afternoon Session.

President SMITH in the Chair.

The President opened the meeting with a brief address of welcome.

An invitation was received from the Naturwissenschaftliche Verein für Schleswig-Holstein to be represented at the cele-